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ABSTRACT

Following a review of literature that uncovered conflicting evidence about the effectiveness of formal and informal methods of finding a job, a study was conducted to test the hypothesis that informal methods (such as personal contacts) were more effective for young adults. Data were collected on a group of Southern rural, poverty-level, fifth- and sixth-grade youths in 1969 (N=1,503), again in 1975 when the youths were expected to be high school juniors or seniors (N=926), and again in 1979 when the youths were three or four years past high school (N=544). Questions asked related to the youths' occupational aspirations in the early years and in high school and to how those aspirations had turned out a few years past high school. An attempt was made to determine life satisfaction and correlate it with job held and method of obtaining the job, whether formal or informal. Groups studied were white and black males and white and black females. Results of the data analysis were mixed, but the hypothesis that informal job search methods were more effective was not supported. The groups tended to vary among informal and formal methods of job search and life satisfaction with no clear pattern emerging. One thread that seemed to wind through the data, however, was that more white youths than blacks had access to the types of informal contacts that resulted in jobs with higher satisfaction. Suggestions were made for research to study various methods of job search, rather than just those classified as formal or informal. (KC)

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Job Search Methods of Low-Income Youth

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Job Search Methods of Low-Income Youth

Introduction

The passage from adolescence to adulthood involves a critical role transition. Like other critical role transitions, such as getting married, becoming a parent, or retiring from work, entering adulthood has the potential for considerable stress. A quintessential feature of a successful transition from dependent youth to independent adult is accepting a job which results in economic independence. Holsinger and Fernandez remind us that the transition is not necessarily a single movement from the roles of student and adolescent to the roles of worker and adult . (Holsinger and Fernandez, 1987). Others, too, have pointed out that the life-course literature increasingly deals with the fluidity of the period from the end of schooling to the entry into a job (Rindfuss, Swicegood, and Rosenfield 1987); Dannefer, 1984; Featherman et al., 1984; Marini, 1987). Whether the transition involves concurrent educational and occupational activities or whether the transition is interrupted by a non-career stint of military service, the transition is not completed until one is independent. And almost always achieving economic independence involves getting a job.

In view of the importance of finding employment for the successful role transition to adulthood, research on job search behavior seems unusually scant. What is more, the studies have used different measures of successful job search methods and have

had conflicting findings on the effectiveness of different methods.

Review of Literature

Using a population of blue collar workers, Reid concluded "that informal methods are very important ...and that those finding jobs by informal methods were no worse off in terms of frictional unemployment, wages, or job preference." (Reid:1972 p.481) McKersie and Ullman (1966) found that for Harvard University alumni the informal contacts were the most effective, as measured by average salaries. In his study of professional, technical, and managerial personnel, Granovetter (1974) concluded that job seekers who relied on personal contacts tended to obtain better jobs than those using other methods. From Wegman's description of group job search training, it seems that the effectiveness of informal search methods is fully accepted. As he describes it, participants " are urged to put most of their time into contacting every potential employer they can identify

to see if there are job openings....They are also urged to contact every friend, relative, or acquaintance in order to see if these sources know of any appropriate job openings." (Wegman:1983,p.322)

Despite the fact that group job search training programs apparently accept the effectiveness of informal job search methods, others hold, or have found, that formal methods are superior. Rees has noted that "economists have traditionally taken a dim view of informal networks of labor market information" and that typically labor economists suggest ways to improve public employment services (Rees: 1966, p. 559). The efficacy of formal job search methods finds support in empirical research. Allen and Keveany's study of two-year college graduates in business and engineering technology did not find that informal methods tended to be best but that those using formal job sources fared better than those using personal contacts for "selected dimensions of the work situation" (1980, p.30). It was further found, however, that the search method did not significantly influence the time necessary to secure employment. There was a statistically significant difference between formal and informal sources and occupational level, with formal methods producing more white collar jobs, informal more blue collar jobs. Formal job search methods resulted in more training-related employment. Differences in mean starting salaries between those using formal and informal search methods were not, however, statistically significant. Thus, Allen and Keveany's results do not support

the hypothesis that informal search methods are superior to formal methods.

A few other studies were found that looked at the relationship between job search method and success in getting a job. Rungeling, Smith, and Scott (1976) studied four rural counties and found that the state employment service (a formal method) was significantly inferior to three other search methods: direct application, using friends and relatives (informal) and "other," the last named including newspaper advertisements, union hiring halls, and private employment agencies, all formal methods. The researchers suggested that the reason the employment service shows poor effectiveness is because its clients were less heavily endowed with human capital (formal schooling, health, training) or that they were more likely to be discriminated against.

Corcoran, Datcher, and Duncan (1980) also focused on how people got their jobs and where they heard about them, but they had no measure of job satisfaction or of search success other than getting a job. They utilized a large sample (Department of Labor) but it was not limited to youth. They found that Black men are more likely than white men to have heard about the job from a friend. In addition, Black men were more likely to have known someone who worked at the place where they got a job and to have been helped by someone in getting the job. But white men were more likely to have received direct help than black men. Women

were less likely to have used informal information and influence than men.

Hulbert (1981) also looked at the effectiveness of job search methods but not at satisfaction. He found that "applying directly to employer" was by far the most effective method for both men and women, followed, for men, by "checking with Union hiring halls," "contacting school placement offices," and "answering local newspaper ads." For women,"checking with private employment agencies," answering newspaper ads," and, then, "asking friends or relatives" were found to be the more effective means after direct application to potential employer. Thus, although both sexes found an informal method to be the most effective, the next most effective search patterns included formal methods, although different methods were found effective for men than women.

Rees (1966) provides a theory for the greater success of informal job-search methods. For the employer, an obvious advantage is cost, although state employment agencies are also cost-free. Referrals from current employees benefit the employer in that friends of the employees tend to be people who are like the employees and who live near the place of work. This helps to reduce turnover, absenteeism, and tardiness resulting from transportation problems. For the employee, the benefits include the ability to acquire information not available through formal sources, for example, what the supervision is like and other specifics of the actual work and workplace. The employee is also

benefited by proximity to the job, and should find that having a friend in the plant is an important "fringe benefit."

What Is An Effective Job Search Method?

The results of previous research are mixed, but more studies seem to have found that informal job search methods are more effective than formal ones. An important conceptual problem revealed by previous research is that there have been a number of different answers to the question of what constitutes an effective job search method. In other words, different dependent variables have been used in studies of the use and effectiveness of job search methods. In a comparison of the effectiveness of formal versus informal search methods, McKersie and Ullman (1966), Gutteridge (1971), and Granovetter (1974) used starting salary as a measure of the effectiveness of the search pattern. Others have considered how long it took to find a job and how related the job was to the person's training (Allen and Keveany, 1980). The obvious measure of effectiveness, whether or not one was able to get a job, has also been employed (Smith and Scott, 1976; Corcoran, Datcher, and Duncan, 1980; and Hulbert, 1981).

Since in normal times few people remain unemployed indefinitely, relating a job search pattern to whether or not one obtained a job may not be the best measure of search effectiveness. Presumably, and, again, in normal times, people looking for a job would be interested in knowing more than how to go about finding some job; it would seem that they would like to

know how to find a job with which they will be satisfied. In the present study, job search methods were related to job satisfaction, generalized satisfaction with life, and an evaluation of how life has been in the four years beyond high school graduation.

It can be argued that reasonably ambitious young people should not be expected to be highly satisfied with their jobs, or for that matter with their lives in general. A third measure used in our analyses was a question which asked the respondents to think about their life plans as of four years ago and to indicate whether things have worked out better, about the same, or worse than they had hoped they would. According to this measure, job search behavior would be considered effective if it resulted in getting a job that allowed one to feel that he or she was progressing toward a goal at some hoped-for rate. Coefficients of correlation between job satisfaction, life satisfaction, and how things worked out scores ranged from .24 to .68, with variations by sex and race. The magnitudes of these correlations indicate that the various measures of satisfaction are interrelated but, at the time, that they cannot be said to be three measures of the same variable.

In a later section we report on the findings regarding the relationships between job search methods and measures of satisfaction. The major point here is that there are different ways of conceptualizing and defining effective or successful job search methods. If, on the basis of our studies, we are to

recommend particular job search methods, it is necessary to specify what we mean by good and poor methods.

Methodology

The data for this study are from Southern Regional Projects 126 and 171, a cooperative effort of the Agricultural Experiment Stations in six Southern states to study longitudinally the occupational and educational goals of low income youth.

The first phase was conducted in 1969 and gathered data in the classsroom from fifth and sixth graders and from their mothers by interview. The second phase was conducted in 1975 when the youth were, or could be expected to be, juniors or seniors in high school. In each state, the principal investigator selected schools which served essentially depressed areas characterized by unemployment and poverty. Once the 28 schools had been selected, permission was obtained to administer questionnaires to entire fifth and sixth grade classes. Six years later, an attempt was made to locate the same students regardless where, or if, they were attending high school. Four years later the respondents were interviewed again. At this stage, they had embarked on their educational and occupational careers. Their aspirations and plans measured at grade and high school levels could thus be related to the beginning realities of their adult lives.

In 1969, completed interviews were obtained from 1503 students. Of these, 55.4 percent were black, 44.5 percent were white, 50.2 percent were male, 49.8 percent were female. In 1975, completed questionnaires were obtained from 470 males and 456 females or 62 percent of those originally interviewed in the fifth or sixth grade. The loss of cases is partially explained by the inability to obtain any re-interviews in one state, resulting in a loss of over 200 black cases. In the third wave of the research, conducted in 1979, there was a further loss of cases due in part to the extreme difficulty of locating the low-income young adults or their parents through the mail. The sample for the present study consists of 35.7 percent of those first interviewed in 1969 and 57.9 percent of those located in 1975. Of the 544 respondents, 35 percent are black, 65 percent are white; 45 percent are male, 55 percent are female.

Measures

The high school questionnaire (1975) asked questions about job preference, how the youth heard about the job they preferred, and which people they had talked with about the kind of job they might have in the future. The follow-up survey four years later asked about jobs held since 1975, including their present job, and it contained questions on the methods used for seeking jobs. Job satisfaction was measured by a four-point question on overall job satisfaction as well as by responses concerning satisfaction with specific features (chance to make money, steady employment,

location that I like, and the like) of the job. Also utilized was a ten-point ladder of satisfaction, with the highest rung representing the "Best Possible Job in the Long Run" and the lowest rung labeled "Worst Possible Job in the Long Run." Respondents were asked to indicate at what step on the ladder they were at present and at what step they would be five years in the future. General life satisfaction was measured by responses to an analogous ladder with end points of best and worst possible life. There was also a question asking respondents to think about their life plans in 1975 and to indicate whether things have worked out better, about the same, or worse than they had hoped they would four years previously.

Hypothesis

From the theory proposed by Rees and supported by some previous research, it was hypothesized that some job search methods would prove superior to others. More specifically it was hypothesized that informal search methods would result in higher job satisfaction and life satisfaction than would formal methods. It was anticipated, based on previous research, that the use of a state employment service would be an inferior search method, and that the use of personal contacts would be a superior method. It was hoped that the research could generate a cluster of job search methods which were sufficiently effective so that they could be recommended to young people for their use.

FINDINGS

The various job sources used by the young people were correlated individually and by the categories "formal" and "informal" with the ladder for job satisfaction. Since many feel that there is a high relationship between job satisfaction and life satisfaction, job sources were also correlated with scores on the life satisfaction ladder. Coefficients of correlation were also computed for the search method and job satisfaction as measured by the question, "How would you say things are working out?" We also looked at where these respondents had learned about their preferred job when they were younger (from teachers, parents, and the like) and who had talked with them about their future job.

Only weak support was found for the hypothesis that informal job search methods result in higher job and life satisfaction than do formal methods. As shown in Table 1, the coefficients of correlation between some specific search methods, such as using parents or teachers to help get a job, and some specific measures of satisfaction, such as the score on the "best possible job" ladder, were significant at the .05 level of confidence. Yet it was not possible to discern an orderly pattern with certain search methods related positively (or negatively) with one or more of the measures of satisfaction for the entire sample.

Another look was taken at the coefficients of correlation reported in Table 1; this time, the intent was to explore the findings for use in suggesting further research. For this

purpose, a confidence level of .10 seemed appropriate. It is found that 23 of the 26 coefficients of correlation on specific search/satisfaction measures are in the expected direction, that is, the informal methods are positively associated with satisfaction, the formal methods are negatively associated with satisfaction.

The concept of job search can be expanded by looking at behaviors temporally and conceptually preceding the actual looking for a job. The behaviors in question concern the job preferences of the young people, how they learned about the preferred job, and who talked with them about the kind of job they might have in the future. Questions on these matters were responded to on the questionnaire administered while the youth were in high school or were of high school age.

Despite the fact that 25 statistically significant coefficients of correlation were found between how the high school aged youth got ideas about jobs or sought advice concerning jobs and the measures of satisfaction, no discernible pattern was discovered. Thus, for Black males, only one job information source, heard about the job from television, was related to a measure of satisfaction. This was a negative association. On the other hand, ten different sources of information or advice about jobs were significantly related to satisfaction measures for white females. All ten were positively related to satisfaction. For the remaining sex-race categories, Black females and white females, seven job source/advice items

were significantly related to satisfaction, some positively, some negatively. More than this, the seven items were not identical for the two sex-race categories.

While not indicative of a pattern, some of the specific relationships may be important considerations in future research. For example, the source, "heard about the job on T.V." was negatively related to later satisfaction for both black males and females. However, "heard about the job from movies" was positively related to later satisfaction for white females. Willingness to accept job advice from a spouse or steady was positively related to the satisfaction measures "Best Possible Life" and /or "Best Possible Job" for all but Black males. This finding may be more important for marriage relations than for job search behavior. It indicates that trust in spouse is positively associated with measures of satisfaction.

Interestingly, for black females and white males, a rather large negative correlation was found with a measure of satisfaction and "talked with father about future job." Possibly the need for rebellion in young people caused these youth to turn away from their initial job choice due to its acceptance by their fathers; this does not explain the absence of the negative relationship in the other two sex-race categories.

White females showed correlations between measures of satisfaction and willingness to take advice from mother, father, and siblings, as well as spouses. White females appeared more accepting of advice than any of the other groups.

The coefficients of correlation reported in Table 2 were for the entire sample who answered the questions relating to job search methods, the ladders "Best Possible Job" and "Best Possible Life" as well as the "How Things Worked Out" question. In order further to refine successful job search behavior, the subsample of all those who responded to questions designed to measure the prestige of their jobs was used to determine the correlation between using formal search methods with the various measures of satisfaction. This caused a loss of 13 Black males, 30 Black females, 17 white males, and 45 white females. Some of these may have been in school or acting as housewives, rather than being unemployed due to an unsuccessful job search. However, the ones remaining in the subsample all have jobs, providing a more critical test of the relationship between job search behavior and job and life satisfaction.

The formal job search "score," which is a ratio of the number of formal sources used to the total number of sources used, showed a significant negative correlation for only one group---Black males. The opposite relationship was discovered for Black females, that is, there is a positive correlation between the use of formal job search methods and the satisfaction measure, "How Things Have Worked Out."

It was noted that the means for the job satisfaction ladder, the life satisfaction ladder, and the "How Things Worked Out" question differed for the various sex-race categories. T tests

were performed and half of the differences between categories were found to be significant at the .05 level or better. (See Table 3.) It was found that Black males scored lower than white males on all of the measures of satisfaction and black females scored lower than white females on two of the three measures of satisfaction. Black males scored lower than both black and white females on life satisfaction, and white males were lower than white females on that same measure.

The lower satisfaction scores for Black young people pose an interesting research question. Are Blacks less happy than whites? Why? If Blacks are less happy, is this because they perceive their opportunities are still limited due to overt and covert discrimination? The present study was made during a period when the unemployment rate was not high. The socioeconomic status of the Blacks was found to be somewhat lower than that of whites (Kenkel: 1981) but the difference would not seem to account for the lower satisfaction scores.

There also seemed to be a difference in the propensity for the different sex-race categories to use formal rather than informal search methods. Black females, followed by Black males, showed the highest use of formal search, with white females and white males the least, as evidenced by the means of the formal search score. Using the t test, it was found that five of the six differences between sub-group means were significant. (See Table 4.) This suggests that Black young people have less access to the informal sources useful to the white youth. Perhaps the

friends and relatives of Blacks do not have knowledge about job vacancies, or perhaps they do not have the influence to help Black youth acquire jobs.

CONCLUSION

The hypothesis that informal job search methods would be positively related to job and life satisfaction was not supported to an great extent by this study. The mixed results found for the different subgroups and different measures of satisfaction strongly suggest that there is much still to be learned about job search methods and their effectiveness. The differences found between Black and white young people are important. Blacks were significantly less satisfied with their jobs and lives than were whites, and Blacks were more likely to use formal rather than informal job search methods. Differences found between search methods and the different measures of satisfaction suggest the need for more refinement of the concepts "effective" and "ineffective" job search behaviors. The individual search methods should be explored in more detail, rather than categorizing the specific methods as "formal" or "informal." There may be important differences between and among different methods classified as "formal," for example. To take another example, referrals from professional friends who are part of an informal network may be useful to those who have professional training and connections, but not possible for the high school graduate or dropout who has no specialization. As a matter of

fact, it may be advisable to get more specific as to search methods than the items used in this study. For example, rather than determining that a person learned about a job from a friend, it may be desirable to find out something about the nature of the friendship and the kind of job the friend had recommended.

It would have made for a less complex presentation had we restricted the study to a single race-sex category, to a single measure of satisfaction, and to a single and simple job search score. For an exploratory study, however, the loss of information to ease of presentation would not have been acceptable.

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Table 1. The Relationship between Job Search Methods and Measures of Satisfaction for Sex-Race Categories

	Coefficient of Correlation	Probability Level
Black Males		
How Things Work Out by:		
Formal search score	-0.23	.09
Job search-govt job	-0.27	.05
Best Possible Life by:		
Job search-agency	-0.25	.07
Job search-military	-0.26	.07
Best Possible Job by:		
Job search-agency	-0.23	.09
Job search-welfare	-0.22	.10
Job search-called	-0.24	.06
Job search-teacher	-0.25	.08
Job search-other	+0.62	.02
Job search-paper,tv	-0.24	.07
Black Females		
How Things Work Out by:		
Formal search score	+0.36	.01
Job search-employer	+0.26	.08
Best Possible Life by:		
Total job sources used	-0.31	.02
Job search-school placement	-0.27	.08
Best Possible Job by:		
Job search-other	+0.84	.01
White Males		
How Things Work Out by:		
Job search-teacher	+0.24	.02
Best Possible Life by:		
Job search-military	-0.17	.09
Best Possible Job by:		
Job search-school placement	-0.22	.03
White Females		
How Things Work Out by:		
Job search-welfare	-0.16	.10
Best Possible Life by:		
Job search-state	-0.15	.09
Job search-welfare	-0.25	.01
Job search-employer	+0.22	.02
Job search-parents	+0.19	.03
Best Possible Job by:		
Job search-welfare	-0.17	.08
Job search-parents	+0.20	.03
Job search-teacher	+0.22	.02

Table 2. The Relationship between Sources of Early Job Information and Advice and Measures of Satisfaction

	Coefficient of Correlation	Probability Level
Black Males		
How Things Work Out by:		
Heard about job TV	-0.40	.00
Black Females		
How Things Work Out by:		
Heard about job TV	-0.22	.06
Job advice-father	-0.30	.00
Talked to father re job	-0.32	.01
Best Possible Life by:		
Job advice - spouse	+0.35	.00
Best Possible Job by:		
Heard about job-told	+0.22	.06
Talked to relative re job	+0.23	.06
Talked to preacher re job	+0.24	.04
White Males		
How Things Work Out by:		
Job advice-spouse	+0.22	.01
Job advice-steady	+0.14	.09
Best Possible Life by:		
Talked to father re job	-0.20	.03
Job advice-spouse	+0.29	.00
Best Possible Job by:		
Heard about job-book	-0.20	.03
Heard about job-paper	-0.23	.01
Job advice-spouse	+0.21	.01
White Females		
How Things Work Out by:		
Job advice-spouse	+0.23	.00
Best Possible Life by:		
Job advice-father	+0.15	.04
Job advice-spouse	+0.17	.02
Job advice-mother	+0.15	.04
Best Possible Job by:		
Heard about job- school	+0.13	.08
Heard about job- movies	+0.14	.07
Talked to peers re job	+0.15	.05
Job advice-spouse	+0.17	.02
Job advice-mother	+0.15	.04
Job advice-siblings	+0.14	.05

Table 3. Means and Differences Between Mean Satisfacation Scores for Sex-Race Categories

Satisfaction Measure	Mean	t-values
Best Possible Job Now		
Black Males	4.01	
Black Females	4.38	
White Males	4.59	
White Females	4.50	
Black Males/Black Females		-1.18
Black Males/White Males		-2.12*
Black Males/White Females		-1.64
Black Females/White Males		-0.73
Black Females/White Females		-0.44
White Males/White Females		+0.36
Best Possible Life		
Black Males	4.85	
Black Females	5.72	
White Males	5.74	
White Females	6.16	
Black Males/Black Females		-2.92*
Black Males/White Males		-3.59*
Black Males/White Females		-5.47*
Black Females/White Males		-0.08
Black Females/White Females		-1.75*
White Males/White Females		-2.04*
How Things Worked Out		
Black Males	2.03	
Black Females	2.17	
White Males	2.22	
White Females	2.34	
Black Males/Black Females		-1.21
Black Males/White Males		-1.75*
Black Males/White Females		-3.31*
Black Females/White Males		-0.44
Black Females/White Females		-1.91*
White Males/White Females		-1.60

*Significant at .05 level or beyond.